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The Global Shift: Ambassador Chas Freeman on the Future of Power

1. China's Motivation for Wealth and Power China has successfully returned to global wealth and power not to conquer others, but to seek its own enrichment, national unity, and respect. There is little evidence that its rejuvenation is driven by an aggressive desire to replace the United States as a global hegemon.

2. American Fear of Eclipse The United States is currently gripped by a fear of being eclipsed by China, which is aggravated by a lapse into xenophobia and authoritarianism. This fear may be a neurosis born of lost supremacy rather than a reaction to actual Chinese aggression.

3. The Rise of Authoritarianism Authoritarianism arises when members of a formerly powerful group feel left behind by economic and social changes. These individuals become vulnerable to leaders who promise to make them great again by blaming external enemies for their dispossession.

4. Leadership Thrust Upon China While the Chinese currently shrink from leading global causes abandoned by the U.S., regional and global leadership will likely be thrust upon them. This mirrors how the United States eventually emulated Great Britain's dominance despite earlier insistence that it would not.

5. Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) Superiority China's economy is now significantly larger than that of the United States when measured in purchasing power terms. In nominal terms, China remains the greatest driver of global economic growth.

6. Innovation Through Stifling American efforts to stifle Chinese innovation have inadvertently galvanized it, pushing China to lead the world in intellectual property production. China now innovates in almost every field of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

7. China as a Civilizational State China is a civilizational state possessing the world's largest community of scientists and engineers. Its entrepreneurial population enables it to set global standards for key consumer, industrial, and energy technologies.

8. Diplomatic Presence and Outreach China has established the world's largest and most widespread diplomatic presence abroad. While the U.S. severs ties to international institutions, China is actively strengthening its role in new and existing ones.

9. Strategic Neutrality Beijing practices strategic neutrality by keeping its commitments limited and its ideology vague. This allows China to act as a conciliator while avoiding entanglement in foreign quarrels.

10. Global Moral Leadership China is emerging as an improbable global moral leader as the United States gains a reputation for bullying and double standards. The U.S. indifference to claims against humanity has damaged its international standing relative to China.

11. Military Containment as a Threat The United States has chosen to treat China's rise as a national security threat rather than an opportunity for economic benefit. This stance focuses on military containment and economic warfare to sustain American primacy in Asia.

12. Taiwan and the Chinese Civil War The U.S. position on Taiwan is intended to prevent the People's Liberation Army from completing its victory in the unfinished Chinese civil war. However, this policy stimulates Beijing to modernize its military and expand its nuclear arsenal.

13. The Great Leap Backward The United States is experiencing a Great Leap Backward, characterized by an assault on domestic institutions like the rule of law and academic freedom. Policies are increasingly based on prejudice and political correctness rather than evidence and expertise.

14. Abandonment of Diplomacy The U.S. has abandoned diplomacy as a means of threat reduction, favoring economic and military warfare. This shift has occurred as the balance of naval and air power on China's periphery turns against the United States.

15. Failure of the Strategic Pivot The much-vaunted pivot to Pacific Asia never actually took place because U.S. armed forces remained pinned down in other regions. The U.S. has since absented itself from Asian councils and gatherings, resulting in strategic abdication.

16. Self-Isolation Through Policy U.S. visa and investment policies are discouraging Asians from studying or working in the country. This self-isolation is an ineffective response to the shifting global balance of power.

17. Rejection of the Rules-Based Order The Biden administration's attempt to replace international law with a rules-based order dictated by the G7 has failed to gain traction. This effort discredited Western pretensions of having superior values to impose on others.

18. Double Standards in War The United States has applied egregious double standards in its stance on foreign wars and its participation in kidnapping and regime change. Specifically, its participation in actions in Palestine has alienated the global majority.

19. Transformation into a Predator The world now sees the United States as a cruel and profiteering predator rather than a caring protector. The lawless use of force and expropriation of foreign resources have damaged the U.S. reputation as a guarantor of security.

20. State Capitalism with American Characteristics The U.S. is adopting a novel form of state capitalism based on political payoff and the protection of vested industrial interests. This system disregards conflicts of interest to enable private enrichment at government expense.

21. Disinvestment in Science The U.S. is disinvesting in education and scientific research while curtailing new technologies like electric vehicles and solar power. This is intended to protect uncompetitive sectors like coal and internal combustion engines.

22. Fragmentation of the World Economy The world economy is fragmenting into regional trade regimes that increasingly exclude the United States. Smaller economies are shifting their reliance to larger ones, like China, that can guarantee trade and investment.

23. Exporting Scientific Talent The United States is exporting its most inventive STEM workers to greener pastures, including China, due to xenophobic policies. This political self-mutilation resembles Germany's forfeiture of scientific leadership in the 1930s.

24. The End of Pax Americana Nations that once felt safe under the Pax Americana now feel obliged to protect themselves against an America seen as bellicose and selfish. The U.S. is withdrawing from the world order it once championed and established.

25. Gratification of the Political Elite U.S. policy prioritizes the gratification of its political elite over strategic calculation. This shift propels other nations toward great powers like China that are willing to fill the leadership void.

26. Consensus-Based Rules The BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization seek a reinstatement of a consensus-based international system free from American dominance. They are developing trade settlement mechanisms to flank the weaponized U.S. dollar.

27. The Unnatural Grouping of Adversaries U.S. confrontations have pushed China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea into a close embrace. These nations have little in common other than their shared enmity toward U.S. dictation.

28. Europe as the Sick Man of Eurasia The European Union currently lacks the unified resolve and institutional capability to pursue strategic objectives effectively. Europe is adrift, struggling with energy insecurity and declining competitiveness.

29. Japan's Strategic Revisionism Japan is increasingly seen as revisionist by China for suggesting that Taiwan is part of its defense perimeter. This shift emboldens independence movements in Taiwan and risks a bloody rendezvous with Chinese nationalism.

30. Distance Attenuates Power The United States is 7,000 miles away from the East and South China Seas, and great distance greatly attenuates power. This raises questions about how long the U.S. can retain military dominance in Pacific Asia.

31. China as a Global Node China is now a world power whose economic and political interests must be considered everywhere on the planet. It is part of a multinodal world order where countries are no longer subservient to a single foreign patron.

32. Self-Containment of the US The U.S. is engaged in a strange version of self-containment, retreating economically while uniting friends and foes against it. The media curates reality rather than reporting it, further blinding the nation to global shifts.

33. China's Internal Stability Contrary to predictions, China shows no signs of collapse and is not growing old before it grows rich. It is using automation and offshoring to maintain productivity and increase per capita incomes.

34. Mindless Drive Toward War The current U.S. drive toward war with China over Taiwan is described as mindless and destined to end in tragedy for all. China prefers to conclude its civil war through shows of force rather than outright warfare.

35. Lack of Strategic Expertise U.S. policy is led by China hawks who have never visited or studied China. The small army of experienced China hands has been decimated and excluded from the policy process.

36. A Record of Defeats The last quarter century of U.S. foreign policy is seen as an unbroken series of defeats, from Afghanistan to the failure of the proxy war in Ukraine. Despite this record, the U.S. continues to believe that pressure and military action can bring nations to heel.

37. Flashy Pseudo-Events Leaders habitually avoid hard political choices, instead favoring flashy signing ceremonies that celebrate the resolution of problems that remain unresolved. This methodology is viewed as self-indulgent and dangerous when applied to China.

38. The Dynastic Cycle Theory The United States is currently 249 years into its independence, which historically aligns with the end of a constitutional order or dynasty. At this stage, dynasties often face internal rebellion, foreign overthrow, or a potential silver age of reform.

39. Space Program for Profit China's space program is fundamentally modeled on the use of rail guns and lunar power stations for economic gain. Every major step in their space exploration has an attached profit motive, such as beaming electric power back to Earth.

40. Terrible Enmity Between China and Japan There is an ongoing confrontation between China and Japan over Taiwan, which was recovered by China in 1945 after fifty years of Japanese annexation. China views Japan's current defense stance as a revisionist threat to the post-war order.

41. Restoration of the Inter-Agency Process A prerequisite for effective policy is the restoration of an orderly inter-agency process and the National Security Council. Currently, the State Department has been nearly obliterated, and professional diplomacy is undervalued.

42. Professionalism in Diplomacy Diplomats should adopt the military habit of hotwashes and interaction reports to learn from past successes and failures. Rebuilding the diplomatic service along professional lines is essential for navigating the multinodal world.

43. Missionary Position Diplomacy U.S. attempts to use economic leverage to push for social change abroad are described as the missionary position of diplomacy. This approach implies a dominance that often angers other nations and fails to achieve lasting results.

44. Influence Through Example The most effective way to exercise influence abroad is to set a good example that other people want to emulate. This Confucian-inspired approach is viewed as far healthier than regime change operations.

45. Sovereignty of People vs. Geography Western concepts of sovereignty focus on maps and geography, whereas traditional East Asian concepts focus on the allegiance of people. This distinction complicates disputes over uninhabited islands like the Senkakus.

46. Multinodal World Order The world is entering a multinodal order where medium powers like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia develop independent roles. A node is a three-dimensional object that allows for far more complex statecraft than a bipolar line.

47. Negotiated Accommodation for Taiwan China's preferred strategy is to convince Taiwan that its best course is a negotiated accommodation with major compromises from the mainland. This is intended to avoid a war that would risk U.S. involvement and devastating strikes on the Chinese homeland.

48. Enabling Taiwan's Avoidance of Negotiation Current U.S. policy focuses almost exclusively on military deterrence, which enables Taiwan to avoid necessary negotiations. This approach is seen as unwise if the ultimate goal is a peaceful settlement of the issue.

49. The Failure of Coercive Dominance The attempt to exercise dominance coercively through economic warfare and sanctions is seen as lawless and ineffective. Other nations are increasingly finding ways to bypass these U.S.-led constraints.

50. The Need for Realistic Coexistence The United States must find a way to realistically coexist with China and leverage its rising prosperity for mutual benefit. Pointless confrontation promises to be catastrophic for both nations and the world at large.

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